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AUTHOR Emmer, Edmund T.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The results of a course-instructor survey (CIS) to assess student perceptions of instructional effectiveness are made available to instructors on the assumption that feedback results in appropriate changes in instructional behavior. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of feedback of CIS results to instructors. Two specific questions provided the basis of the study: (a) Does CIS feedback positively affect subsequent student ratings? (b) Does the content of the scale influence the likelihood of change for instructors receiving feedback about the scale? Twenty-nine instructors in junior and senior level education courses at the University of Texas at Austin participated in the study, with the number of students in their classes ranging from 25-45. To obtain scores for feedback to instructors, the CIS was administered at midsemester and during the last week of the semester. At midsemester, the instructors also completed the CIS for their own teaching as they believed students perceived it. Fifteen instructors received CIS information at midsemester, and 14 instructors who received no feedback of CIS results constituted the control group. Results of the study did not support the general effectiveness of CIS feedback. A table containing the highest loading items on the CIS factor and a bibliography are attached. (JS)

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INSTRUCTOR PERCEPTION, CONTENT OF SCALE, AND FEEDBACK EFFECTIVENESS.

Edmund T. Emmer, The University of Texas at Austin
Patrick McBurnette, Southwest Educational Development Lab
O. L. Davis, Jr., The University of Texas at Austin

Use of a course-instructor survey (CIS) to assess student perceptions of instructional effectiveness is widespread. Typically, the results of such surveys are made available to the instructors, apparently with the implicit assumption that such feedback will result in appropriate changes in instructional behavior. Several studies have been conducted to determine whether such feedback indeed does result in improved instruction (as measured by the students' ratings), but the findings of these studies have been mixed. On the positive side, Gage, Runkel, and Chatterjee (1963) found that when pupil ratings of their "ideal" teacher were fed back to teachers, subsequent teacher behaviors were perceived by the pupils as moving closer to the ideal ratings, compared to a control group which did not receive the ratings. In a study by Tuckman and Oliver (1968), perceived teacher behavior was more positive when pupil ratings of the teachers were used as feedback, compared to supervisor ratings or to no feedback of ratings. Studies showing no effects for feedback include one by Miller (1971) and one by Centra (1972). Both studies compared groups of teachers receiving feedback of student ratings to no feedback groups. Centra (1972) did find, however, that some teachers who received feedback did change positively. Generally, these were teachers who had initially expected to receive more positive ratings than they actually received from their students.

The purpose of the present study was to further investigate the effects of feedback of CIS results to instructors. Specifically, the following questions were examined: Does CIS feedback positively affect subsequent student ratings? Does the instructor's accuracy in perceiving how his students rate him influence the liklihood of obtaining subsequent improved ratings? Does the content of the scale influence the liklihood of change for instructors receiving feedback about the scale? In other words, feedback on some types of items might have an effect, whereas feedback concerning other items might be of no consequence. It was expected in this study that if significant effects for feedback were found, they would be on scales whose items represented concrete, behavioral characteristics rather than scales whose items reflected more the personal attributes of the instructor.

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Procedures

The participants in this study were 29 instructors in junior and senior level education courses at the University of Texas at Austin. Eight of the instructors held faculty rank; the remaining twenty-one were teaching assistants. The courses represented in the study were educational psychology, general methods, and several special methods courses. All participants were assured confidentiality prior to their participation. The number of students in the various classes was moderate, with no class exceeding 45, and most classes having numbers in the 25-35 range.

The questionnaire used in this study was the Course Instructor Survey (CIS): Student Questionnaire, form 2, made available through the Measurement and Evaluation Center of The University of Texas at Austin. The CIS consists of 40 items, 35 of which require students to respond on a four point scale about their perceptions of the course, the instructor, and his teaching activities. The form used was based in part upon suggestions from a committee of students in the College of Education, and some items reflect the concerns of this population (e.g. "The instructor seemed genuinely interested in making me an effective teacher"). However, most items are applicable to instruction in all areas of undergraduate college courses.

To obtain CIS scores for feedback to instructors, the CIS was administered in each of the 29 classes at midsemester and during the last week of the semester by student proctors. The instructors were not present during the administrations of the CIS. Students were informed that the purpose of the midsemester administration was to provide some of the instructors feedback about their course before the semester ended. Students were also told that since their instructor might see their responses before assigning grades they should disguise their handwriting, if they wished to add any comments.

One of the purposes of the study was to determine whether an instructor's perception of his teaching behavior, relative to his students' perceptions, might influence feedback effectiveness. To provide a basis for testing this hypothesis, instructors were asked, at midsemester, to complete the CIS for their own teaching, as they believed students perceived it. The CIS was completed prior to any feedback.

Within two weeks of the midsemester survey in their classes, 15 instructors, randomly chosen from the total group, were given the results of the CIS in their classes. The group of 15 instructors receiving the CIS information at midsemester were designated as the Feedback group. The results transmitted as feedback included the mean and S.D. of the class response to each item, the instructor's percentile ranking on the item based on norms from a large number of classes surveyed the preceeding semester, and the frequency of response to each item alternative. These results were those generally made available to instructors participating in the CIS end-of-semester survey. The remaining 14 instructors who received no feedback of the CIS results constituted the control group for the study.

Results

The intercorrelations among student responses to the 35 items from the CIS were factor analyzed, using the principal components solution with rotation to the varimax criterion. Six factors were identified. The factors, and the items most highly correlated with each factor are listed in Table 1. Scores on each factor for each student were computed, and from these factor scores, means for each class were obtained. The mean change from the midsemester to the final administration for each of the six factors was the unit of analysis for the tests of hypotheses.

In order to test the hypothesis that the amount of discrepancy between perceived and actual ratings affects subsequent behavior, the instructors were divided into three discrepancy groups for analysis. The CIS completed by each instructor at midsemester was scored on each of the six factors listed in Table 1. The discrepancy between the instructor's score and the midsemester class mean was then computed. For each of the six variables, instructors were divided into three discrepancy groups according to whether they believed that (1) students would perceive them more positively than they actually did (Positive discrepancy); (2) students would perceive them similarly to what they actually did (Low discrepancy); or (3) students would perceive them more negatively than they actually did (Negative discrepancy).

The data were analyzed using a 2 (feedback - no feedback) x 3 (levels of discrepancy) ANOVA design. Each of the six CIS variables was analyzed separately.

The hypothesis that feedback of CIS results has a general effect on subsequent instructor behavior was tested by the main effect for the feedback-no feedback dimension. In none of the analyses was the F ratio significant at the .05 level. Thus, there was no support for this hypothesis.

The hypothesis that the effect of feedback is a function of the degree or type of discrepancy between the classes' ratings and the instructor's perception was tested by the interaction effect of the feedback-no feedback dimension and the discrepancy dimension. On five of the six factors there were no significant interactions. On one of the factors, Adequacy of Evaluation, the interaction was significant ($F = 4.16$; $p < .05$, $df = 2,23$). Compared to the no feedback groups, instructors in the Positive discrepancy and the Low discrepancy groups received higher ratings after feedback, whereas Negative discrepancy instructors changed least. This result is consonant with the hypothesis since the Negative discrepancy instructors are those who received midsemester ratings on this factor higher than they expected, and who thus would have least motivation to alter their behavior.

Discussion

The hypotheses that feedback of CIS results has a general effect on subsequent instructor ratings was not supported. There was some support for the hypothesis that change in CIS ratings is a function of the item content and of the discrepancy between the instructor's perception and the class rating. On the scale "Adequacy of Evaluation" more change was observed among instructors who were not rated as well as they had expected, than among instructors who received feedback that was more positive than they anticipated. It is also worth noting that "Adequacy of Evaluation" contains items which reflect quite specific behaviors. Thus, changes on this variable might be a result of an instructor's ability to identify readily those behaviors that reflect a low rating and to alter his behavior accordingly. Such a change might also be more easily identified by students, since the behavioral referents for the items are presumably as obvious to them as to the instructor.

On most of the other factors, the items are less descriptive of instructor behavior, and sometimes simply indicate student behaviors or feelings rather than those of the instructor. The apparent exception is the factor "Instructor Disinterest," which identifies instructor behaviors at approximately the same level of specificity as "Adequacy of Evaluation." Since no significant effects were obtained for "Instructor Disinterest," the hypothesis that change in instructor behavior is related to both discrepancy and item content can be advanced only very tentatively, although the arguments in its favor are plausible. From a common-sense point of view, the greater the specificity with which instructional behaviors are identified during feedback, the easier it would be for an instructor to identify what should be changed. From a more theoretical perspective, Schmuck (1971) suggests that teacher self-confrontation procedures result in anxiety which could lead to one or a combination of the following counterproductive defensive strategies: (1) perceiving "ideal" performance states as unrealistic, (2) perceiving information about actual performances as invalid, (3) perceiving information about discrepancies between ideal and actual performances as being typical for all teachers, or (4) perceiving actual performances as pursuing unstated goals. Defensiveness could conceivably obviate any classroom performance feedback provided to an instructor. However, such defensive behavior, while influencing receptivity to feedback for all types of items, might be less pronounced for a specific, behaviorally referenced item than for items with less obvious behavioral referents.

That the present study does not support the general effectiveness of CIS feedback is consistent with findings from Centra (1972) and Miller (1971), which were conducted in college settings. On the other hand the results conflict with the findings of Gage, et al (1963) and Tuckman and Oliver (1968), which were conducted with elementary and secondary teachers, respectively. It is possible that receptivity to feedback is included among the many variables differentiating these groups of teachers.

A tentative recommendation that can be made from results of this study

is to include in course-instructor evaluation questionnaires, items which are as behaviorally referenced as possible, presuming that change in instructor behavior is a desirable outcome of the feedback process. Other feedback modes could also be experimented with, perhaps in conjunction with the traditional CIS feedback procedures.

Table 1. Highest loading items on each of six CIS factors.

Factor	Item	Loading
Instructional Effectiveness	He presented the material coherently, emphasizing the major points and making clear their relationships.	.80
	The instructor seemed to be well-prepared for lecture or discussion.	.76
	The examples and illustrations used made the material clearer to me.	.75
	He usually held my attention during class.	.74
	Given the opportunity I would probably choose this instructor again for another course.	.72
	He was intellectually stimulating.	.70
	I enjoyed attending class.	.67
	He usually was aware of whether the class members were following his discussion or lecture with understanding.	.67
	I found this course to be interesting.	.62
Instructor Disinterest	The instructor often failed to come to class without previous notification.	.67
	The instructor referred to his experiences too often.	.65
	The instructor had annoying habits which were distracting.	.61
Adequacy of Evaluation	He had sufficient evidence in terms of class participation and written work, to evaluate my achievement.	.71
	He commented individually on my written work, either orally or in writing.	.65
	He usually returned tests and assignments promptly.	.58

Table 1, cont'd.

	The meaning of questions on his tests were usually clear.	.55
Student Involvement	I made an honest effort to learn in this course.	.68
	I learned much material applicable to my future work.	.55
Receptivity To Students	He made me feel free to ask questions, disagree, and express my ideas.	.68
	He was fair and impartial in his dealings with students.	.68
	The instructor in his dealings with students seemed to respect them as individuals.	.66
Amount of Work/Difficulty	In my opinion the class assignments were too time-consuming.	-.69
	I thought this course was unusually difficult for me.	-.67

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